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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUBLIN 000114

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [EI](#)  
SUBJECT: IRISH GOVERNMENT CONDEMNS ATTACK ON BRITISH  
SOLDIERS IN THE NORTH; WILL RAISE INCIDENT DURING ST.  
PATRICK'S DAY BILATERAL

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Classified By: Pol/Econ Section Chief Ted Pierce;  
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

#### Summary

1. (C) The government of Ireland has condemned the attacks in Northern Ireland on March 7 that killed two British soldiers. Irish government officials say that the Northern Ireland Assembly, the British government and the Irish government are coordinating their responses closely. Dublin also sees Sinn Fein and the DUP in the North working well together in response to the violence. Prime Minister Brian Cowen will likely raise the incident with President Obama during their bilateral discussion on March 17 at the White House, emphasizing the need for unity of action and saying this incident demonstrates the continuing need for a U.S. Special Envoy to the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Martin Fraser, Assistant Secretary, Northern Ireland and International Division, Office of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) said it would be a mistake for NIA First Secretary Peter Robinson and Deputy First Secretary Martin McGuinness to cancel their trip to Washington for St. Patrick's Day events because the trip will emphasize Sinn Fein and DUP unity in addressing the crisis and will give the leaders a "reward" for their ability and willingness to continue to seek peace in the face of provocation. He suggested it would be useful for a high-level official of the Department of State (in the absence of a Special Envoy) to phone both McGuinness and (especially) Robinson to express support and appreciation for their efforts to respond to the attack. This assessment reflects the view from Dublin, which we think will be useful for our colleagues in Belfast and London who are dealing with the situation on-the-ground. End summary.

#### Irish Government Statements

2. (U) In response to the attack on British troops on March 7 in Northern Ireland, Irish leaders issued statements condemning the violence.

#### Begin Statements

##### 1A. Statement by Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Brian Cowen:

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the murders in Antrim. I extend my heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved and to the injured. I look forward to seeing those responsible brought swiftly to justice. We had all hoped that senseless violence was a thing of the past. Violence has been utterly rejected by the people of this island, both North and South. A tiny group of evil people can not and will not undermine the will of the people of Ireland to live in peace together."

The Taoiseach has conveyed a message of sympathy to the Prime Minister. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has also been in contact with the Northern Ireland Secretary.

1B. Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheal Martin:

"Let us be clear. The targets of this attack are the Irish people, North and South. This is an attempt to undermine the remarkable progress of recent years. The perpetrators of this assault have no mandate. They will not be allowed to succeed. They must be brought to justice."

1C. Statement by President Mary McAleese:

President McAleese has expressed her shock and dismay at last night's attack at Massereene British Army Base in Co. Antrim.

The President condemned the violence in the strongest terms and said that her thoughts and prayers were with the families of those who had been killed and with the injured.

End Statements  
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13. (C) On March 9, POLOFF spoke with Martin Fraser, Assistant Secretary, Northern Ireland and International Division, Office of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). (Note: Fraser will be part of the Prime Minister's delegation to the St. Patrick's Day bilateral meeting with President Obama in Washington on March 17. End note.) Fraser indicated that the Irish government had no reason to refute the claim of responsibility by the Real IRA, though, he said, British intelligence had initially thought the perpetrators might be Continuity IRA because of the geographical location of the incident.

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14. (C) Martin made two key points. First, the Irish and British government have been in close consultation on the incident. Cowen has talked with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Martin has spoken with British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Shaun Woodward. The two countries are in absolute lockstep in responding to the attack. Second, from the Irish perspective, the political parties in the North (especially Sinn Fein and the DUP) are "hanging together" in dealing with this provocation. Martin noted that Sinn Fein has met with the Chief Constable and that NIA leaders Martin McGuinness and Peter Robinson are visibly coordinating a unified response. Martin stressed the Irish government's view that the key to managing the potential political fallout from this incident is for third parties -- especially the British government -- to leave enough space for Sinn Fein, the DUP, and other political parties in the North to respond cooperatively and prove that "murderous dissidents" do not have a political mandate or strategy "other than killing people."

St. Patrick's Day Discussion  
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15. (C) Martin said that the Prime Minister will "likely" raise the incident with President Obama during their bilateral discussion on March 17 at the White House, emphasizing the continuing threats to the Northern Ireland peace process and the need for unity of action by the political parties in the North, the British government, the Irish government and the U.S. (Comment: We expect Cowen will say that this incident demonstrates the continuing need for a U.S. Special Envoy to the Northern Ireland Peace Process. End comment.)

Possible USG Action?  
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16. (C) Martin stated that the Irish government sees it as

absolutely critical for NIA First Secretary Peter Robinson and Deputy First Secretary Martin McGuinness to travel to Washington together for the St. Patrick's Day events at the White House. While noting that the bilateral meeting with President Obama was a Republic of Ireland affair, he said that Robinson and McGuinness' presence would reinforce Irish policy on the North in emphasizing Sinn Fein and DUP unity, and giving the leaders a "reward" for their ability and willingness to continue to seek peace in the face of provocation. It would be "a mistake," he said, for them to cancel their trip. Martin suggested that it would be useful for a high-level official of the Department of State (in the absence of a Special Envoy) to phone both McGuinness and (especially) Robinson to express support and appreciation for their efforts to cooperate in responding to the attack.

#### Sinn Fein's Response

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¶7. (C) On March 8, POLOFF spoke with Rita O'Hare, the Sinn Fein Representative to the USG and Treasurer of the party. O'Hare equally condemned the attack, echoing Sinn Fein President's statement on March 8. She declared that Sinn Fein and the vast majority of republicans in Northern Ireland were appalled by the attack, which she laid at the doorstep of a splinter republican group. (Note: Later in the day, the Irish press reported that the Real IRA, a republican splinter group, had claimed responsibility for the attack. End note.) O'Hare stated that this incident highlighted the danger of renegade splinter groups, which, she said, were using the republican mantle to perpetrate incidents that could destabilize Northern Ireland and deflect attention from their true intentions -- criminal endeavors, including drug smuggling, weapons dealing, extortion, and the like. She specifically pointed to a group of republican criminals who are loosely allied under the banner of "Oglaigh na hEireann" ("Warriors of Ireland"), a name used by early nationalist paramilitary groups. O'Hare said that her greatest fear was that the British government would over-react. She was especially nervous about the potential negative impact on republicans in the North of bringing MI-5 into the investigation. Nonetheless, she said that Sinn Fein recognized that this was the first major test of the peace process and that republican Sinn Fein would do everything in its power to cooperate with unionists, keep republicans calm, and deal with this incident as "the criminal attack it was."

#### Comment

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¶8. (C) This assessment reflects the view from Dublin, which we think will be useful for our colleagues in Belfast and London who are dealing with the situation on-the-ground.  
FAUCHER